



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

News Release

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ICE NABS 11 DRUG TRAFFICKERS IN MULTI-AGENCY BUST

Operation "Smugglers of the Caribbean" produced 12 arrests, firearms charges and more than seven million dollars in forfeiture allegations.

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico—U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) today announced the arrest of 12 drug traffickers who allegedly imported cocaine and heroin from Antigua, British West Indies and St. Maarten, Netherlands Antilles, to distribute it in Puerto Rico in violation of Title 21, United States Code (USC), sections 841, 846, 853, 952, 960, and 963 and Title 18 USC sections 2, 922 and 924.

Jorge A. Paret-Ruiz, Efrain Santana-Ortiz, David Molina-Pitre, Adalberto Coriano-Aponte, Hiram D. Molina-Santos, Heiry Pantojas-Sostre, Nilda Molina-Maysonet, Felix F. Rodríguez, Pedro A. Tosado-Morales, Hiram D. Molina-Santos and Roberto E. Baez-Melendez were arrested by federal and state agents in the vicinity of Vega Baja for the alleged conspiracy to import narcotics into Puerto Rico.

The indictment alleges the defendants engaged in plans to ship cocaine from Caribbean countries to Puerto Rico and used coded references in their conversations to describe drug transactions, keep each other informed of criminal activity, plan future transactions, and share information about drug trafficking activities to avoid detection and ensure the success of their criminal organization. As part of the conspiracy, the defendants arranged and coordinated the pick-up of United States currency from the sale of narcotics and used a Kahr .40 caliber semi-automatic pistol in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime.

The indictment further alleges a conspiracy to possess and distribute crack in the town of Vega Baja and other municipalities in Puerto Rico. The defendants purchased multi-kilogram quantities of cocaine at wholesale prices and cooked part of it to create the cocaine-based narcotic. This was later placed in small packages for its sale and distribution.

“Federal, state and local law enforcement agencies are working together to keep drugs off the streets of Puerto Rico and their importation to the mainland,” said Lydia St. John-Mellado, acting special agent in charge of ICE investigations in Puerto Rico. “With the cooperation of law enforcement agencies at all levels in Puerto Rico, ICE will continue investigating and dismantling drug trafficking organizations and putting these unscrupulous smugglers and traffickers behind bars.”

Forfeitures in this case ascend to approximately \$7 million in real and/or personal property and penalties ascend to five years to life imprisonment.

The public is reminded that an indictment contains only charges and is not evidence of guilt. The defendants are presumed innocent and are entitled to a fair trial and the government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

This case was investigated by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), Puerto Rico Special Investigations Bureau (NIE), Puerto Rico Police Department (PRPD) and the United States Attorney’s Office for the District of Puerto Rico.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.